



McDougalls Good Stories For Children



Magic in a School House—The Wonderful Tale of a Fairy Wand. Hidden for Hundreds of Years in a Hollow Tree and Found by a Poor Boy

"FAIRY tales serve no useful purpose," said the wise schoolteacher. "I am quite sure that, as there never was a fairy, it is better to say nothing about them."

"Suppose a fairy should walk right in here, what would you do?" asked Perry Stratton.

The teacher smiled and said: "Supposing that the impossible could happen, I would demand that she prove herself a fairy by doing some impossible thing, such as changing me into a horse, for instance."

No sooner had the words left his lips than the schoolteacher changed into a horse. Right before the astonished eyes of all the school stood a big brown horse, with what seemed to be the teacher's very smile still on its face.

The school held its breath. The horse, too, seemed to feel the astonishment that held the children spell-bound, and stood as if it dared not move.

Suddenly, as if recalling his last words, some of the children rose in terror and started toward the door, when Perry called out:

"Say! Don't be scared! It's only an old horse! He can't hurt you!"

Thus arrested, they turned and all the school gathered around the animal, which, after all, was their teacher in another shape, examining him with much interest and guessing at the cause of the transformation. The horse gazed appallingly at them, as if begging for help, and seemed to feel how ridiculous he looked, but in a few minutes Hardy Williams, the biggest boy, said:

"Well, it's done, and he's a horse, all right! I suppose he's being punished for the way he treated us all winter! Can't see any other reason for it!"

"Let's take him out and hitch him to the old stage that stands in the hotel yard," suggested Mason Miller.

The horse reared his head aloft as if in protest, but they dragged him along by his mane, and pushed him as well, until the door was almost reached, amid loud laughter and shouts. He seemed quite gentle and evidently tried to avoid the desks and the stove as he passed along, but the children were quite wild with excitement.

Just at the door it became evident that a horse could not pass through it, and a halt was called, but while the boys were debating the possibility of chopping away the woodwork a man's voice was heard outside, and at the door appeared Mr. Wiles, the Chairman of the School Board. The loud noise had attracted his attention in passing and he turned to enter, but the spectacle of a horse inside of that little school room had brought him up all standing, as sailors say. When he came in, of course, the tumultuous din ceased at once.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

"Teacher's been changed into a horse!" said Peter Hughes, timidly, for nobody else seemed willing to speak.

"What!" roared Mr. Wiles. "Don't trifle with me! How did that horse get in here?"

"It's the truth!" exclaimed Mary Wiles. "It's really the teacher, pa. He just turned into a horse right before our eyes!"

"That's impossible, and you know it!" declared Mr. Wiles.

"Hardy Williams, I suspect you of getting up this piece of mischief, although I suppose all hands are in it. Tell me at once how you got this horse inside of that door!"

Hardy began to blubber: "I hadn't nothin' to do with it. I didn't even see him change, but when I looked up there he was in the middle of the room!"

Mr. Wiles choked with anger. He couldn't speak, but he shook his freckled fist at the whole crowd. Then a little fair-haired girl in a blue cotton dress pulled a blue-eyed boy by the sleeve, far back on the edge of the gathering of scholars, and whispered to him:

"I wonder if the stick did it?"

He looked down furtively at a slight wand of yellow wood, that he had kept hidden up his sleeve all this time, and the girl said:

"Try it again, and see if it does anything."

Tad Bristow, for that was his name, pointed the piece of wood toward the school house and whispered, in an awed voice, his hand trembling somewhat, as he waved the stick:

"Change into the teacher again!"

Instantly the sad-faced horse, looking out of the narrow door, was transformed into the pale and thoughtful teacher, who seemed still unaware of the change, but when Mr. Wiles roared out:

"Where have you been? What does all this mean?" he passed his hands over his body, and discovering that he was no longer a horse, he smiled gleefully.

"Come inside, Mr. Wiles," he said. "And all of you enter and take your seats."

When the school had again resumed its usual appearance, the teacher said:

"This has been a wonderful and most astonishing experience, and one that has taught me a lesson, although I cannot explain how it happened. To be changed into a horse is an experience that—"

"Bosh! Humbug! Tommysto!" shouted Mr. Wiles. "You don't mean to tell me that you believe you were that horse?"

He rushed out and hurried away, filled with rage and disgust, but the schoolteacher smiled, for he knew well enough that he had really been a horse for a short time and was not likely to forget it.

"I am now quite convinced of the existence of magic and all the rest of it," said the teacher. "Such a thing couldn't happen under natural conditions, and it now remains for us to discover what it is that has caused it all. If any of you happen to know what particular means were used to transform me into a horse, I will be much obliged if you will tell the school, for this is really a very serious matter."

Many of the scholars looked very much alarmed, and a few laughed.

"I repeat my request," said the teacher. "Whoever knows the facts, stand up and state them. I am not angry. I only wish to learn the cause of this wonderful occurrence."



The Fiery Dragon Became So Tame That His Chief Duty Was to Act as a Cigar Lighter

was Bessie Hampton, whispered to Tad Bristow, the blue-eyed, curly-haired boy, who sat in the very last seat, and he rose.

Bessie, who was the daughter of the richest man in the county, was especially fond of him, and the two were constant companions. She rose a moment after Tad had stood up, and then the teacher looked even more surprised.

"Are you both concerned in this?" he asked.

Both nodded, and then Tad spoke:

"Well, this is how it happened: Bessie and I were walking in the woods when we met an old woman who told us a story about a fairy. She said this fairy lived a thousand and one years ago in those very woods, and she was false to the rest of the fairies and she did something that was against the rules."

"She fell in love with a mortal man!" interrupted Bessie, "and they never forgave that, the old woman said!"

"Yep, that's what it was," added Tad. "So to punish her they put a spell on her, and made her live away up in the top of the tallest tree where this man couldn't ever find her."

"It was an evergreen tree, and it had leaves all the year round so he could never see up in it," said Bessie.

"Well, after that a long time passed, and time by she just wore out and—"

"And faded entirely away!" added Bessie. "She dwindled and withered all up!"

"But her fairy wand, that every fairy has, you know, that didn't wither, but after a long time the tree got all hollow inside, and she lived in there; and when she withered all up the stick stayed there all right. The old woman told us she thought it was made of witch hazel, or something like that."

"But 'tain't it made of ivory, and it has all sorts of funny marks on it?"

"Well, after that we used to go hunting 'round for hollow trees, and I guess we found more'n a million, but there wasn't any wand in one of them. Then we gave it up, but yesterday afternoon, when we were sitting on an old rotten stump down by Webster's Mills, I saw something sticking up out of it and I pulled the wand out."

The school, including the teacher, was now in a state of intense excitement, and all were crowded about the blue-eyed boy, who drew from his sleeve a thin wand of yellowish ivory.

"I knew it was the fairy's wand, and so did Bessie, just as soon as we saw it. I cleaned it all off and tried to make out the marks on it, but they are just like Hebrew writing, or maybe Chinese. We didn't do anything with it, but when you said you would like to be changed into a horse—"

"No, no! I never said that!" cried the teacher; "I said I would make a fairy prove her power by doing that!"

"Well, all right. When you said it I just pointed the wand at you to see what it would do, and said, as I waved it at you, 'Change into a horse,' and you did, right off!"

The teacher shuddered.

"I certainly was a horse," he exclaimed, "but even now it seems incredible!"

Just then Mr. Wiles returned with Dr. Pennington, another of the School Board.

"Tad Bristow did it, Pa!" cried Mary Wiles, pointing to Tad, but shrinking away from him.

"Aha! Then the culprit has been detected. Stand out here! Now tell me how you did it!"

"I did it with this!" said Tad, showing the fairy wand.

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, I'll change you into a calf and tan your hide for you!" he roared. "Gimme that stick!"

"I won't. It's mine, and nobody shall take it away from me!" said Tad, determinedly.

Bessie had remained standing close by her friend,

and when Mr. Wiles sprang toward them Tad laid his hand on her shoulder and waved the wand. The next moment all of the school fell back from the spot in horrified amazement, for the two children had vanished!

After a moment the teacher said:

"Alas! They are gone! Who knows what terrible thing has happened, and it's all your fault, Mr. Wiles! If something dreadful happens to Mr. Hampton's daughter you are responsible, for you forced the boy to use that dangerous instrument of magic!"

"I—I didn't mean to hurt him!" stammered Mr. Wiles, in great fear. "I only meant to make him confess. I had no idea—"

"They had both already confessed, and were explaining it all when you entered and frightened him into making another test of his power," said the teacher.

"Heaven only knows what has happened now! Who can guess what dreadful wish suddenly entered his head?"

But nothing could be done, of course, for the two children were beyond the reach of ordinary means. The whole village went almost mad over the strange occurrence. Mr. Hampton was furious and threatened to sue or even to attack Wiles, but that did not bring back the two lost ones.

Two beautiful marble monuments were erected on the green common to their memory, inscribed:

IN MEMORY OF
TWO LOST CHILDREN,
GONE INTO THE WHENCE:
HOW AND WHERE
WE KNOW NOT.
BESSIE HAMPTON
AND
THADDEUS BRISTOW.
DISAPPEARED MAY 13, 1897.
WE MOURN OUR LOSS.

Now, I suppose you are anxious to know what happened to them, and have, perhaps, guessed at a great many things that might have been done by Tad when Mr. Wiles attacked him so savagely as to alarm him. Instead of promptly turning Mr. Wiles into a grunting pig or a big, bristly porcupine or something like that, as I would certainly have done, Tad whispered, as he waved the wand:

"I wish we were in fairyland!"

Instantly, and without feeling any motion at all, they both found themselves sitting on a mossy bank, surrounded by flowers, beneath tall and beautiful palm trees.

Far in the distance, across emerald meadows, through which wound silver streams, they saw violet-tinted mountains wreathed with snow clouds, and in the near foreground rose tall and splendid castles, gray with age and moss-covered, from the battlements of which floated gay pennants and banners, upon which were seen lions, dragons and other animals embroidered in colors.

Richly-dressed men and women moved in the beautiful gardens of these castles, and they heard gay music and laughter coming from these groups. Falcons darted aloft after frightened herons, on-prancing horses men in golden armor, bearing bows and shields, rode along the deeply worn roads; heralds blew on golden trumpets from the towers, and, as Tad almost instantly saw, they had been brought into a land of the past.

They knew from the ancient costumes, the old

castles and the armored men that they had been taken back a thousand years, at least, and that they were in what was fairyland then. Thus they also learned that fairyland had gone never to return.

Tad said: "Come, Bess, we will go down and visit them. I think it will be very amusing to talk to people that lived so long ago; and, too, it will be as good as going to school!"

The castle folk hastened to meet them and asked them whence they came, thinking them, of course, the children of some faraway dwellers. They all examined their straw hats, their shoes and stockings, for the latter garments were not worn so long ago, and their other attire, and when Bessie's diamond ring was noticed they all cried:

"A princess! See that splendid stone!"

They were taken into the castle and shown its marvels, which consisted of a vast array of deer-heads, weapons, some tapestry hangings, a few pieces of carved furniture, some great oaken chests filled with golden cups and things.

Well, Bessie and Tad found that they were very interesting, indeed, to the castle folk. Of course, when Tad spoke about bicycles or cameras, for instance, nobody knew what he meant, but when the talk was of dragons, cockatrices, basilisks or demons all were able to tell him much.

When he tried to produce such things as bicycles or electric lights to show to these people, the wand refused to act at all, and he soon found that it could not make anything which was unknown in the dark ages, but it was a wonder when it came to creating dragons and other old-time monsters.

Tad used to go out in the woods and summon tremendous things just to dispel them by a wave of his wand and see Bessie turn pale, but he did not reveal his marvelous wand to the castle dwellers.

Something told him to keep his secret safe, and it was well he did.

One day when they were out hunting, a merry company on horseback, with horns blowing, falcons on wrist and greyhounds in leash, the nobleman who owned the castle came upon some peasants gathering wood, and with angry words and hard blows he drove them away. Tad spoke, without reflecting:

"It's a shame to use them so! Pity the poor people!"

The count replied angrily: "Mind your own business, sirrah, and that quickly, lest I lay the whip to your back!"

"It would be the last time you ever used it if you did," said Tad, at the same time taking out his wand, for he saw that the noble was enraged.

The count raised his heavy whip to strike, while all the attendants turned pale, but before it fell the count suddenly became a monkey. There he sat making faces at Tad and uttering funny sounds. All of the other nobles rushed up and seized the boy, shouting:

"A conjurer! A magician! Sorcerer! Slay the conjurer!"

Now, of course, Tad might have changed them into all sorts of things, or promptly wished himself home with Bessie, but he desired to frighten them and so he waved the wand and summoned a dragon.

It appeared at once, rushing out of the forest, breathing fire and smoke like a steam engine and rattling its scales with a noise like thunder! The nobles fled at once and left the supposed wizard to face the monster, but it came to Tad with a broad smile and said:

"Master, what will you?"

"Return with me to the castle and we will scare the wits out of these old fogies," said Tad.

Now Bessie had remained at the castle, and when the frightened crowd returned they all clamored for her to be burnt as a witch, because they knew that she was too wise to be an ordinary child.

There was the grinning monkey to prove that her companion was a wizard, and as he was defended by

a dragon she was the only one at their mercy; so they carried her promptly to a pile of wood, which in those times was pretty nearly always ready to burn somebody, and, tying her to a stake, set fire to the pile just as Tad arrived with the horrible dragon.

The smoke was so thick that at first he could not see what was going on, but when he heard the people cry: "Witch! Sorcerer!" he knew that they had seized pretty Bessie and were about to burn her.

Waving his wand he changed the flames to icicles in a twinkling and dashed up to the pile.

"Sick 'em!" he shouted to the dragon, and the monster dashed into the crowd.

Oh, there was a scrambling then, I tell you, and many of them were swallowed by the dragon before they could escape into the castle, while Tad released Bessie from her bonds. When the great court-yard was deserted he called to the dragon and said:

"We will stay here no longer. Let us go to some more pleasant place."

"There's a fine old castle that has been deserted for many years over in the mountains, near my den," said the dragon. "In fact, I guess I ate up nearly everybody around there long ago, but it's a nice healthy place, and as there are no neighbors you will be undisturbed."

"But suppose you should take a fancy to eat us?" cried Bessie, trembling.

"Oh, I couldn't be so impolite," declared the smiling monster. "Besides, I never did like girls. I mean, as food."

"Now you are very impolite, already!" said Tad. "I've a good mind to get a fire extinguisher and put out your furnace!"

"Do not do that!" cried the dragon, with a shudder. "I will take you to a place where there lies hidden a pile of red gold and precious stones, too, enough to make a king turn somersaults, and you will be able to furnish your castle more richly than any in the land!"

"I think I'd rather go home, where we have all the improvements," replied Tad; and I guess that's what we'll do. I'll take you with me to show them what kind of beasts they had in fairyland!"

"But you won't let anybody go for me with that fire extinguisher you spoke of, I hope?" inquired the dragon, anxiously.

"Nope, but I'll put a damper in your throat like we have in our furnaces, so that you won't be too liberal with your fire," replied Tad; and then he wished that they were all three at home in Chid-hurst.

Well, you may imagine the excitement they created when they suddenly appeared on the green common, right by their own monument, and how surprised they were when they learned that they had been absent for seven years!

At first nobody recognized them at all, but when Mr. Hampton came along with Tad's mother and heard their voices all were overcome with joy, and even the dragon shed a tear at sight of such happiness.

Then they went to Mr. Hampton's house and put the dragon in the barn, for he was setting all the dogs in town quite crazy.

There they are still, and if you live near Chid-hurst you have probably seen them yourself, and the dragon as well, for it often wanders about town quite freely, and yet with its fire so checked that men sometimes actually light their cigars by it.

Tad's wand has so tamed it that it never eats anybody, but lets the children, of which it is very fond, ride on its scaly back and even poke their fingers into its eyes without a protest.

But it never goes near the engine-house, for it knows that's where they keep the fire extinguisher, and that's the only thing he's afraid of.

WALT McDUGALL.